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## CHAPTER SIX

# Honors Contracts: A Scaffolding to Independent Inquiry

CINDY S. TICKNOR AND SHAMIM KHAN  
COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

**H**onors contracts can be valuable curricular assets if aligned with institutional goals and properly supported to overcome the challenges they sometimes present. At Columbus State University (CSU), honors contracts allow students to achieve one of our primary learning outcomes: honors graduates will demonstrate the ability to design independent inquiry projects that require critical and creative thinking. We believe graduate schools value this ability, and we know that employers in our community seek honors graduates who can work independently on extended projects, communicate effectively, and solve problems analytically and creatively. We achieve this important learning outcome by requiring a senior project or thesis and use honors contracts as a tool to develop students' research skills, connect their academics with personal goals, and help them to grow as professionals in their fields. With adequate planning and structured assessments, honors contracts can

be a valuable part of the honors curriculum and an efficient strategy for maximizing limited resources. At CSU, honors contracts have evolved from an economic necessity that replaced upper-division honors offerings to an essential component of our curriculum that provides fundamentally different educational experiences than traditional honors courses.

## **INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT**

Columbus State University (CSU) is an open access institution for students who live within a 50-mile radius of our campus. Our primarily undergraduate university currently enrolls about 6,800 undergraduates and 8,400 students overall. CSU proudly promotes the campus as one of the most diverse in the southeastern United States. With 60% female, 49.5% non-Caucasian, and 31% first-generation students, the institution's largest minority group identifies as Black or African American. In addition, over 80% of students live off campus, and 47% of our undergraduates are Pell Grant recipients. Our institutional strategic plan aims to serve this diverse population with the high-impact practices inspired by the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (Schneider). In particular, our institution promotes first-year experiences, international education, servant leadership, and undergraduate research. In addition, our new campus-wide Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted as part of our university's accreditation process, strategically supports real-world problem solving.

Within this context, the CSU Honors College enrolls between 250 and 300 students, approximately 3.5–4.0% of the undergraduate population, and meets the National Collegiate Honors Council's (NCHC) recommendations for a well-established honors college. Approximately two-thirds of our students enter as first-years, with over 50% coming to CSU from outside the region. CSU's honors students add to the diversity of the university, representing both a student population seeking a traditional residential college experience and one commuting from around the local area. Our honors population is not as diverse, however, as that of the institution as a

whole. Only 20% of honors students identify as African American, Black, Hispanic, or more than one race; 27% have unmet financial need; 17% are first-generation college students; and 72% are women. The honors application asks students why they want to participate in honors, and an analysis of 253 applications yielded three prevalent themes: applicants want to socialize with like-minded peers, enhance their educations, and challenge themselves. As one student writes:

I want to push myself to work as hard as I can and to be the very best student I can be. I want to build strong, long-lasting relationships with scholars and students who are very similar to me, academically or otherwise. I would like a chance to grow and expand my horizons.

Our program attracts many different majors, with our largest enrollments in biology, music, and theatre. Overall, 34% of our students major in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields and 25% in the fine and performing arts. Our curriculum must serve all of these majors while remaining attractive to and supportive of our racially diverse student body.

## **Curricular Objectives**

The primary role of our honors college is to attract and retain high-achieving students. We do so by tailoring our curriculum to our students' individual goals with three overarching objectives: broadening their educational experience through interdisciplinary studies, enhancing their collegiate experience with personal and professional development opportunities, and deepening their disciplinary knowledge with undergraduate research. Undergraduate research includes all creative and scholarly inquiry resulting in a well-defended thesis, juried performance or exhibition, or professional product that enhances an academic field. This broad definition encompasses everything from traditional theses in history and empirical studies in the sciences to lecture recitals in music and creative software design in computer science. All undergraduate research satisfying CSU Honors College expectations must be

grounded within a body of extant literature and include a manuscript that is presented to a faculty committee in a formal defense.

We meet these three overarching objectives of our curriculum with a combination of honors courses and seminars, on the one hand, and a point system that incentivizes activities that address learning outcomes, on the other. These point-earning activities, in which students typically earn one point for each academic credit hour or fifteen service hours, fall into one of three key areas aligned with our objectives: academic enhancement, personal enrichment, and research and inquiry. In the academic enhancement area, for example, students earn points toward honors graduation by completing activities that develop interdisciplinary perspectives or taking honors core courses that emphasize interdisciplinary studies; these experiences might include study abroad or the completion of a minor, second major, or academic certificate such as Medieval and Renaissance Studies or Servant Leadership. In the area of personal enrichment, students earn points by engaging in leadership activities or training, serving their community, pursuing professional development activities like job shadowing, or completing seminars on wellness. In the third area of research and inquiry, students earn points by building their capacity to complete the senior thesis or project, a requirement for all CSU Honors College graduates. The learning outcomes associated with research and inquiry prepare students to conduct independent research and creative work. Students therefore earn points for independent studies, undergraduate research experiences, the dissemination of research results, and the completion of honors course contracts (typically in preparation for a senior project or thesis).

### **Senior Project Requirement**

Students are advised to enroll in a two-course sequence for their senior project by the second semester of their junior year. The first course is a one-credit senior project proposal course, which has a prerequisite of completing at least one honors contract. The second is a two-credit course for the thesis (or an alternative to the thesis) and defense. During this two-course sequence, students meet

biweekly in small groups facilitated by the honors college dean or associate dean. The meetings are opportunities for students to share their progress, set personal writing goals, learn time-management strategies, and commiserate about the challenges that arise during the process.

An honors thesis can be daunting for many students, especially when they are required to complete a formal defense. Rather than shaping requirements in response to student fears, however, our faculty advisory committee and community advisory board are committed to helping students face and overcome those fears by meeting the senior thesis requirement. Faculty argue that students who complete a thesis demonstrate their understanding of the academic knowledge-production process and their ability to confront difficult intellectual problems. They also argue that the sustained effort required to complete a thesis often results in a highly valued relationship between the mentor and mentee. Working with a faculty mentor to solve a complex problem or explore a theory in the lab or archive is the ideal shared-learning experience for an honors student. Community members see this process as valuable for other reasons: these projects, they argue, demonstrate that our students can complete substantial independent work, a skill particularly valued by our business leaders in a series of focus groups conducted in spring 2017. Businesses desire employees who can deliver results on assigned tasks self-sufficiently and with minimal oversight.

## **HONORS CONTRACTS**

The CSU Honors College values the thesis process for all of these reasons and thus recognizes the need to prepare students for success by creating a curriculum that bolsters their confidence, develops their research skills, and supports the development of positive mentoring relationships that intentionally move students toward conducting independent research (Brown, Daly, and Leong). Contracts play an essential role in this curricular scaffolding. Before asking students to engage in a one-, two-, or even three-semester project confronting a significant problem in an academic field, we first require them to complete at least one honors

contract in the area of research and inquiry because we believe that these more limited research experiences set students up for success in their capstone projects. At CSU, contracts are not just integrated: they are essential.

## **Developing Research Skills**

Like other institutions, CSU defines honors contracts as clearly articulated agreements between students and faculty that describe specific activities to be completed in a semester and that connect with a non-honors course (Bolch 49). In our point system, honors contracts earn three points, which is the equivalent of an honors three-credit course, and students may earn no more than nine points for contract work. Faculty teaching the non-honors courses are responsible for mentoring the honors students in their contract work and assessing their final projects.

The process of establishing timelines and expectations, negotiating the terms of the contract with the faculty mentor, and meeting regularly with that mentor are all skills necessary for conducting independent research that extends beyond the constraints of a semester. Students learn not only from their success in completing these smaller projects but also from their failures. For example, a few years ago our honors student vice president, who was active in several campus organizations, proposed a contract on risk and resilience in her psychology course. The contract required her to research alternatives to disciplining children with spanking, produce a research-based report for a public audience, create a meme to “grab people’s attention and present facts in a creative way,” and link the meme electronically to her report. She clearly intended to make a significant impact on our community with this project. After several discussions with her faculty mentor, however, the student withdrew from the ambitious project because of its scope and her other time commitments. One year later, under the guidance of the same mentor, the student was able to build upon her ideas and initial research from the unfinished contract to complete her thesis: “Understanding the Relations Between Violence, Discipline, and Dehumanization.” This is one example of how our honors contract

process, which allows students to withdraw from a project at any time, is a low-risk opportunity to hone the skills and understanding they require to complete independent work.

## **Connecting Personal and Professional Goals**

While contracts serve the curricular goal of developing skills needed to complete a thesis, that particular goal alone has little appeal to a majority of our students. Therefore, in the contract proposal process, students must not only explain how the contract enhances an upper-division course in their major but also connect that contract work to their personal and/or professional goals. Students are encouraged to propose personally meaningful, creative projects that allow them to learn content or skills directly applicable to their career paths, that add unusual experiences to their education, and that create educational opportunities not afforded to them at our institution.

We provide students with specific examples of how contracts can enrich their courses personally and professionally, and since these examples were created by previous students, they build a more robust case for the value of contracts. A biology major in our pre-medical advising track, for example, completed an especially meaningful contract in a genetics course, exploring a disease prevalent in her family. Collecting and analyzing her family's DNA, she also developed professional skill in DNA barcoding. A nursing major planning to work in a neonatal intensive care unit researched best practices for pharmacological challenges and interventions on premature infants in her pharmacology class. An art major contracted in a photography course to attend lectures by international artists presenting at a photography festival in a large nearby city. Because CSU does not offer a film major, a dual theatre and English major completed contracts on screenwriting and directing to enrich the available curriculum. In each case, honors contracts trained students in specific skills and thus made personally and professionally meaningful a course that might otherwise have just met a major requirement.



Recognizing contracts as such an opportunity, we proactively advise our students to avoid the busy work of simply adding an extra paper to fulfill honors requirements; that option, as Badenhauen warns, can be tempting for busy students and faculty (8). Not only do we know from experience that students will be less likely to complete such contracts, but they will also be wasting the opportunity to shape their educations in fundamental ways. In addition, because carefully crafted contracts often engage students in developing as professionals in their fields, contract projects provide excellent work examples that can be discussed in personal statements or interviews or presented at professional conferences. Furthermore, the one-on-one interactions with faculty mentors can lead to future endorsements for awards, letters of recommendations for graduate studies or professional employment, and a mentoring relationship for thesis work.

### **Developing Professional and Mentoring Relationships**

For the honors student, the contract represents an opportunity to engage one-on-one with a faculty member before embarking on a senior thesis or project. Interaction in the classroom and written feedback on homework are no substitutes for this experience. For faculty, too, contracts are an opportunity to connect with students on a level and at a depth not possible in a regular classroom. Although contracts can be perceived as time-consuming, faculty at our institution have anecdotally shared that they find fulfillment in mentoring that involves discussion of their professional activities, graduate school experiences, strategies for managing a research agenda, and even work-life balance. Such mentoring introduces students to the world beyond the pages of their textbooks and homework; they often take their first steps onto the bridge between academia and the outside world with contracts. Talking with mentors about their scholarly work and specialization gives students a glimpse of possible ways to develop their own interests and skills.

These discussions answer a range of student questions from “How is research done?” to “What benefits can graduate studies offer?” to “Which skills are the most relevant in today’s fast-changing

world?” Enhancing the work of an upper-division course with a contract project teaches students skills of value not only in their senior theses or projects, but also quite possibly for the rest of their careers. Two specific students described below—“Luis,” whose interests lie in cybersecurity, and “Ethan,” who was curious about natural language processing—used contracts as an introduction to the field of machine learning, one of the most sought-after skills in today’s high-end job market. Their honors contracts not only helped them grow by enhancing skills, but they also defined a possible career direction that one of them has already followed since graduation.

### **Luis and Cybersecurity**

As an honors student in the software-systems track of the computer science program, Luis did not have room for additional study beyond his major requirements: the program allows for very few electives, leaving him unable to pursue his interests in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cybersecurity. When he was enrolled in an AI course, however, the honors contract process allowed him to apply AI techniques to solve problems in cybersecurity. Specifically, this contract empowered him to learn about artificial neural networks and anomaly detection. In computer network security, anomaly detection is a technique for building a user profile for an individual’s normal daily computer usage. Just as the name suggests, the technique identifies anomalies in user activities that might flag unauthorized access. User profile information can become training data for artificial neural networks designed for anomaly identification. In his thesis, “Using Self-Organizing Maps for Computer Network Intrusion Detection,” Luis showed that self-organizing maps, which are a type of artificial neural network, can be effective tools for intrusion detection. He also found three major limitations of this approach: the difficulty of finding adequate training data, the time required for training self-organizing maps, and the inaccuracy of result interpretation by inexperienced users. The honors contract enabled Luis to explore and think critically about a topic outside his academic program and led to a senior project that allowed creative

scientific thought about a significant problem in the field of computer science.

## **Ethan and Natural Language Processing**

Ethan's honors contract grew out of his desire to work in the field of Natural Language Processing (NLP), an active area of research and development in computer science and a technology crucial to artificially intelligent systems. Ethan was introduced to NLP as a junior in an undergraduate research course with his faculty mentor. Ethan used the NLP skills learned in class for a contract designed to help identify patients with aortic aneurysms. As a leading cause of death in the Western world, complications relating to aortic aneurysms have substantial healthcare and societal costs. Detection of this condition usually happens too late, with a survival rate of less than 10%. Tracking patients with this condition is therefore vital for saving lives through timely intervention. Despite the enormous volume of radiology reports generated each day from abdominal scans, however, the task of reviewing them for potential aneurysm cases is still performed manually. Ethan's project aimed to automate this process with NLP, creating an algorithm for processing radiology reports and detecting any positive indication of an aneurysm. Using both NLP and machine-learning, Ethan sought to find cases in which an aneurysm was detected without follow-up. The algorithm flagged potential cases with a 95% accuracy. Ultimately, not only did Ethan's project meet our expectation that students develop skills related to our curricular area of Research and Inquiry, but it also exemplified collaboration between industry and academia on professional problem solving. Ethan built on this contract by spending a summer semester working as an intern with a company specializing in the development of health informatics software.

The experiences that Luis and Ethan gained through their honors contracts benefitted each of them in several ways. They both took the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned in introductory and major-specific courses to problems of practical significance. Luis's honors contract gave him valuable experience with intrusion detection, a contemporary issue of enormous cybersecurity

importance. His final thesis project applied both cybersecurity and machine learning, which is an increasingly popular problem-solving method from the field of artificial intelligence. Although Ethan was introduced to basic NLP techniques early, applying those techniques to problems with real data and in conjunction with machine learning truly cemented his understanding and prepared him for a successful career in NLP and machine learning. He has already been hired by the company where he worked as an intern.

Both Ethan and Luis have demonstrated that they now know how to think independently and critically. Both of them were required to build upon their initial contract research by writing a thesis, which they then had to defend through presentations and question-and-answer sessions. They developed the skills to formulate a research proposal, shape a research methodology, analyze data, draw conclusions from experimental results, and convey their findings in writing and orally. The honors contract experience gave each of them a passion for independent inquiry. Although already employed since their graduation, both of them plan to return to research as graduate students in the future.

## **SUPPORTING AND ASSESSING HONORS CONTRACTS**

These cases illustrate the unique value of honors contracts and their essential role in meeting our curricular goals. Achieving these goals, however, requires a well-supported and administered honors contract process that gives students and faculty an understanding of contract objectives along with the freedom to develop creative projects that meet their own goals and those of the honors curriculum. Providing professional development and resources for faculty engaged with honors students in contracts is just as important as offering those resources to faculty developing honors courses. Furthermore, efficient movement of proposals from conception through approval to completion is essential for both administrators and faculty mentors. Finally, contract assessment must be embedded in the completion process and clearly aligned with curricular goals.

## Professional Development

Our professional development strategy for students and faculty includes a collection of online resources. For students, we outline the purpose of honors contracts in our student handbook and offer creative project ideas housed in an online library of past contracts that is organized by discipline. For faculty, we have created brief online videos, called *Faculty 5 Videos*, which describe honors contracts and their connection to the honors curriculum. The three videos, each approximately five minutes long, offer 1) an overview of resources available to faculty and students; 2) a guide to proposing and approving honors contracts; and 3) a series of specific, tested tips for managing and mentoring contracts. Rather than expecting faculty to attend workshops or devote several hours to learning about honors contracts, the videos are available on demand and serve as introductions to the process for new faculty and refreshers for seasoned faculty. When a faculty member contacts the honors college office with questions about contracts, we can remedy the concern quickly with an emailed hyperlink and a follow-up phone call. We also provide articles on mentoring undergraduate research and creative endeavors (Ticknor).

## Approval and Completion Processes

In addition to these resources, we have developed an online proposal and submission process that allows electronic signatures for both faculty members and the dean. The system, which the office of institutional technology developed as a workflow process, works much like electronic abstract submissions for conferences; it even provides opportunities for revision. Because it is conveniently linked to the student information system, students can select a course from their current enrollment registration. The form automatically fills other fields from their course selection, including instructor name and email, thus reducing data entry errors. The dean's view of the system features a color-coded dashboard indicator of the proposal status, making it easy to identify contracts submitted by the student and awaiting faculty approval (yellow),

approved by faculty (light green), and approved by the dean (dark green). Links on the dashboard provide more details about the proposal and options to edit, request revision, approve, or archive contracts. Finally, a separate downloadable report in a comma-separated-value (CSV) file is available for end-of-term reporting and personalized communication via mail merge. In addition to the online approval process, a simple electronic completion form is sent by email at the end of the semester, asking faculty to indicate whether the contract has been fulfilled and to complete a brief survey assessing their experience of the honors contract system.

### **Assessing the Impact of Honors Contracts**

Our assessment of whether students have met learning outcomes in our honors curriculum depends upon the collection and evaluation of summative assignments in our first-year seminar that are compared to signature work in our senior capstone course and senior thesis manuscripts. We use the data collected from assessing both honors courses and contracts for formative assessment. For honors courses, we evaluate syllabi content to gauge the interdisciplinary nature of courses and then monitor student evaluations, which include questions about the quality of instruction and student perceptions of whether a course challenged them to consider disciplinary perspectives outside their major. We do not, however, monitor the quality of student work produced in honors courses since that is the purview of honors faculty. Similarly, contract assessment focuses not on the quality of the product produced by the student, which the faculty mentor evaluates, but on the nature of the educational experiences through time. This system allows students and faculty to propose and complete a wide variety of projects as long as they meet the expectations of 1) enhancing course content, approved by the faculty mentor, and 2) developing skills related to our curricular area of Research and Inquiry, approved by the dean. Contract approval indicates success in meeting these expectations, and we then add to this data by surveying faculty upon project completion. This evaluative survey communicates our

expectations for contracts, reinforcing the information provided on our website and in our *Faculty 5 Videos*.

Faculty complete this electronic survey as they indicate contract fulfillment at the end of the term. For each contract, we email faculty the Honors Contract Completion Form that collects required information about the student's satisfactory completion of the project and optional feedback evaluating the characteristics of the contract itself, the approval process, and our professional development resources. (See the Appendix.) Even though responses to the second section are optional, we have enjoyed an 85% response rate.

### **THE IMPACT OF OUR HONORS CONTRACTS**

Beyond the anecdotal examples we have already shared, survey results suggest that our honors contracts are effective and provide a variety of experiences for honors students. Between fall 2013 and spring 2018, students completed 340 contracts to the satisfaction of our faculty, representing 85% of all proposed contracts. The honors contracts were mentored by 147 unique faculty members, who could answer the evaluation questions repeatedly if they mentored multiple students per semester or across several semesters. In total, we collected 327 surveys through the completion form, representing 96% of completed projects.

The survey asked faculty to identify all categories of work that applied to the project, and they were also allowed to describe projects as "other." The table below provides summary data about the nature of the completed projects. Clearly, most projects required some type of written report; however, only 36% of those responses did not also identify another type of work. Most science lab work, for example, also required a report, and many writing projects were related to creative endeavors, such as performances, artistic production, and software development. In other words, only 36% of the contracts produced only a written product. Faculty mentors agreed or strongly agreed that honors contracts required students to delve more deeply into the course material than was required of their typical students (96%), allowed the development of better mentoring relationships (84%), and produced scholarly work that

the student might elect to pursue in the future (70%). In addition, 36% indicated that the student was able to learn about the professor's personal area of research through the process. Mentors also found the process of proposing, approving, and completing the contract to be efficient (91%) and reported receiving adequate support from the honors college (87%), with only 2% (three faculty members) either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with either of these two statements. Significantly, only 2% felt that mentoring the contract took too much of their time, suggesting that faculty view honors contract work as part of their normal responsibilities of teaching, mentoring, or serving the institution.

#### Type of Work Completed for Contracts

Writing a report or a creative piece	251
Presenting the project	99
Working with primary documents	64
Working in a lab	52
Problem solving	47
Experiential learning	45
Working with a team	21
Completing field work	12
Service learning	3

Since fall 2016, we have added five additional questions to our survey in an effort to ensure a high level of student work and to align each contract with our learning outcomes for interdisciplinary studies, critical thinking, and evaluation of resources within the discipline. With 94 completed surveys, we have found that 87% of faculty believed that their mentees displayed enthusiasm for their projects, and only 6% felt that their students could have worked harder. Encouragingly, 34% believed that the results of the honors contract should be professionally disseminated, a belief that suggests the high quality of the work produced. Furthermore, 87% of faculty said that the projects required students to think critically about their topic, 62% claimed that the project involved more than one



disciplinary perspective, and 75% asserted that contracts required students to evaluate resources required to support arguments in their field. Overall, this assessment process results in evidence that honors contracts enrich course content, require students to think critically about that content, and reinforce learning outcomes associated with developing interdisciplinary perspectives.

## CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

CSU provides one example of how honors contracts can be grounded in curricular goals, implemented effectively, and assessed meaningfully. In our case, honors contracts support the learning outcomes associated with conducting undergraduate research, but they may also be adapted to other objectives such as enhancing service-learning programs, supporting the development of cultural competence, or encouraging civic engagement. Honors contracts are clearly not replacements for honors courses, but they can—and do—transcend mere budgetary necessity.

Before implementing a curriculum that employs honors contracts, we would recommend that institutions consider, as we have done, the following questions:

- How can honors contracts contribute to the overarching learning outcomes of the honors curriculum? What skills do you intend for your students to develop by completing a contract?
- How will completing honors contracts add value to students' educational, personal, or professional goals?
- How will you assess the contribution of honors contracts to honors learning outcomes? What are your points of data collection (e.g., student evaluations, faculty surveys)?
- How can the proposal and approval process be efficiently managed?
- How will you communicate the goals and benefits of contracts to your faculty?

- In what ways can you incentivize faculty to mentor projects (e.g., rewards for tenure and promotion, end-of-term book cards, stipends)?

The final two questions are particularly important, and we continue to struggle with them. While honors contracts are beneficial for students, they do, as suggested above, present extra work for faculty. That work is often unpaid, as at our institution, and inconsistently rewarded in the tenure and promotion process. Yet our faculty actively support honors students conducting contract work because of a variety of benefits, most notably the intellectual challenge or stimulation they experience in mentoring a student. This benefit is firmly grounded in the context of our institutional mission and student demographics. Since we are primarily an undergraduate institution that serves many commuter students, most faculty do not have access to traditional graduate research assistants, and some departments actively seek students who would be excellent additions to their research teams.

Our post-contract faculty surveys support this idea: 36% of mentors believe that their student's contract project allowed that student to understand more about the faculty mentor's personal research projects. When this pathway to research works, it can be transformative for faculty. For example, one CSU chemistry professor recently recruited an honors student in organic chemistry to join her research lab and to learn the process of synthesizing molecules as part of an honors contract. The molecules that the student synthesized were later used by another honors student on the professor's research team; this second student tested the attributes of the molecules for his senior thesis project. While this example demonstrates an ideal situation for STEM faculty, many—or even most—honors contracts do not directly relate to the faculty mentor's own research agenda. In fact, faculty at our institution often feel lucky when at least one of their courses connects directly to their research interests.

Even when students propose contracts in areas unrelated to faculty research, however, the benefits of mentoring can be pedagogically useful, as Bambina suggests in Chapter Five of this volume.

At CSU, an honors history major, for example, not only produced a European historiography for her contract, but she also presented her work to classmates and led a follow-up discussion. This project created space for intellectual discussions with her mentor and, in turn, sparked new ideas for a series of discussions in the course. The same student later completed another project with a second history professor who described, anonymously in our 2013–2018 faculty survey, how this “very self-motivated” honors student took on “an incredibly challenging topic on early Islamic/Christian apologetic and polemical work” that “effectively straddled the disciplines of history and religious studies—the latter of which is still quite new to her.” Together, they “spent a number of meetings reading texts, going over feedback on her drafts, and addressing many of the larger issues of the field,” a collaboration of interest to the professor. Whether such discussions enhance course instruction or research, faculty members most often say they value the intellectual stimulation of the mentor-mentee relationship. This benefit echoes the primary reason for students to complete contracts: an honors contract is the first step toward completing independent work and developing as a professional in their field.

Overall our honors contract system has evolved from an economically prudent method to deliver our curriculum to an essential educational activity that is 1) fully integrated with the professional development needs of our students, 2) responsive to the community workforce development goals, and 3) logistically manageable for a small honors administrative staff. The Columbus State University Honors College is a case study of how honors contracts can be used strategically to build a student’s capacity to complete independent inquiry projects. We are able, through our students and faculty, to provide diverse curricular options that allow students to customize their education while meeting the learning objectives of the CSU Honors College.

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## APPENDIX

**Honors Contract Completion Form**

Thank you for working with a student from the Honors College this semester. Please complete one form for each honors contract submitted to you this semester, indicating whether or not the student completed the work. You may also complete an optional survey below to help improve the contract process.

1. Email address \_\_\_\_\_

2. Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

3. Course \_\_\_\_\_

4. CRN \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please select one of the following:

The student satisfied the requirements of the contract.

The student will NOT be completing the contract.

6. What is the student's anticipated grade?

A

B

7. This honors contract included (check all that apply):

Working in a lab

Writing a report or creative piece

Presenting the project

Working with primary documents

Service learning

Problem solving

Experiential learning

Teamwork

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**OPTIONAL Contract Evaluation**

Please also take a moment to evaluate the honors contract process. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement when you consider this particular honors contract.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. While completing the contract, my student . . .				
required too much of my time to mentor.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
produced an innovative or creative scholarly work that the student may continue to pursue.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
thought critically about concepts in my field.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
produced average work and could have worked harder.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
identified and evaluated resources used to support arguments in my field.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
produced work that should be professionally disseminated.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
analyzed concepts from multi-disciplinary perspectives.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
was not enthusiastic or engaged in the work.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The process of proposing, approving and completing the contract was efficient.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I received adequate information and support from the Honors College to mentor the contract.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Please share any additional comments about your experience with this contract:				

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